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"Truth uncompromisingly told": Narrative Subversion in *Billy Budd, Sailor*

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The narrator of Herman Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor* (1924) is challenging. He complicates his narrative with thick metaphors and similes, excessive allusions and digressions, as well as a complex narrative structure. He leaves his narrative unresolved by avoiding ending his story with the protagonist's death. These narrative ambiguities make the narrator an unreliable guide, who does not seem to give readers any explicit norms by which they can judge the whole story. Indeed, they have created a striking division among critics of *Billy Budd, Sailor* into two groups: the "acceptance" group and the "resistance" group. The former maintains that Melville accepts the execution of Billy Budd, the protagonist, as valid, whereas the latter argues that Melville resists it as unjust. Thus, the obscurity of the narrative brings about two opposite groups regarding how to interpret the author's attitude toward Captain Vere's judgment of Billy Budd.

In this essay I will approach this ongoing issue in the light of narrative technique. Despite the ambiguities and subtleties of the narrative, it is important to discern the rational kernel within the mythical shell. Judging the narrative as indeterminate makes one overlook the narrator's implicit determined creeds. The narrative ambiguities hide his effective irony toward the problematic captain. The seemingly unresolved ending with three additional chapters stems from the narrator's plan on subversion. I attempt to explore the narrator's hidden moral standard under the surface obscurity of the narrative. First, I will show that although the narrator romanticizes Vere into a noble hero, he subtly relegates the captain into a Gothic villain by associating him with Claggart. Second, I will illuminate how the narrator unsettles the main plot, in which Vere portrays a heroic captain and his naval discipline is triumphant, through the subversive last three chapters. Third, I will examine how the narrator satirizes the deteriorating features of men-of-war and how he penetrates the true destructive nature of war through Billy's victimization. In these ways, I will elucidate Melville's complicated narrative devices and show his determined "resistance" to the worship of brutal force.

1. The Triumphant Captain Undermined

In analyzing the narrative technique of *Billy Budd, Sailor,* critics have argued that the narrator is on the side of Vere throughout the story. They have focused on how the narrator justifies Vere's conservative position and defends his decision to execute Billy. James Duban, for instance, argues that the narrator, like Vere, is a Burkean conservative and that he presents the captain as heroic and sympathetic in victimizing Billy. Cyndy Hendershot, likewise, holds that the narrator, a Burkean conservative, regards Vere's political thoughts as natural and that he sympathetically sentimentalizes Vere's sufferings in executing Billy. Judging from the narrator's comments on Vere's thoughts and deeds throughout the story, we can certainly see the affinity between the narrator and Vere. The narrator's attack on the Nore mutiny as irrational and chaotic (53-5) echoes Vere's criticism of revolutions as opposed to the world peace and human welfare (63). Countering the surgeon's doubt of Vere's sanity, he defends Vere's decision to keep secret the death of Claggart by explaining the prevalent fear of

mutinies in that age to the reader (Ch. 21). His stress on the importance of naval code rather than the "primitive basis" of right and wrong in judging Billy's deed (103) evidently parallels Vere's insistence on military duty rather than moral scruple at the drumhead court (110). As Hendershot indicates, in Vere's private interview with Billy (Ch. 22), the narrator surely romanticizes the captain into a fatherly, tragic hero. Finally, in Chapter 27, just after the execution of Billy has been carried out, the narrator takes the standpoint of the officers controlling the sailors, and focuses on the way the whistles and drums successfully silence the sailors' indistinct murmur. This narrative point of view impresses on the reader's mind the triumph of martial discipline. All these parallels between the narrator and Vere suggest that the former is approving and sympathetic toward the latter. The narrator elevates Vere into a noble and pathetic hero.

However, criticisms of the affinity between the narrator and Vere seem to ignore that the narrator's approving attitude toward the captain is a little too explicit. This explicitness arouses our doubt as to whether the narrator really justifies the problematic captain's thoughts and deeds. For instance, conjecturing the sentimental embrace of Billy and Vere in their private interview, the narrator uses rather exaggerated words: "the sacrament," "two of great Nature's nobler order," "inviolable to the survivor," "holy oblivion," "diviner magnanimity," and "providentially" (115). In these "quasi-liturgical" words, Robert Milder sees Melville's admiration for the human in Vere (104-5), but the excessiveness of the language makes us skeptical. It tempts us to assume that the narrator plants irony toward the very captain that he ennobles. It seems possible to approach the narrator's hidden irony in two ways: comparing Vere with the other main characters, Claggart and Billy, and analyzing the structure of the narrative. In these two ways we can find out that the narrator challenges readers to reach his implicit criticism of Vere's execution of Billy.

Critics tend to separate Vere from Claggart and Billy, because the former is presented realistically whereas the latter are presented allegorically.[1] This separation seems reasonable, but it may ignore the similarities between Claggart and Vere. Claggart is evidently presented as a Gothic villain in the traditional sense. His former life is unknown, but rumors suggest that he used to be a swindler (65). He is linked with "Natural Depravity," "dangerous insanity," and "the mania of an evil nature" (75-76). His nature acts like the "scorpion for which the Creator alone is responsible" (78). In the cabin, facing Billy, Claggart is likened to "an asylum physician" and a mesmerist, and his glance is "one of serpent fascination" (98). The narrator consistently regards the master-at-arms as mysterious, sinister, poisonous, insane, frightening, and the evil in the Biblical sense. He allows no sympathy for Claggart, and keeps the reader detached from him.

Unlike Claggart, Vere is not presented as Gothic Other, but in closely reading the narrator's descriptions of Vere we can note he shares with Claggart certain characteristics. Merlin Bowen has indicated the similarities between Claggart and Vere: both of them represent civilization and "head," have excessive intellectuality, and are very cautious (218-225). To develop this persuasive indication, we should focus more closely on the narrator's language. First of all, the narrator regards both of them as "exceptional" (74 and 75 for Claggart; 62 and 96 for Vere). Second, he sees both of them as undemonstrative, secretive, and distrustful. "An uncommon prudence" is habitual with Claggart's "depravity," because "it has everything to hide" (80). His suspiciousness can be seen in his erroneous doubt whether Billy intentionally spilled soup in front of Claggart (79). Similarly, Vere is presented as "the most undemonstrative of men" (60) and as "not very demonstrative to his officers" (94). When Claggart reports an accusation of Billy to Vere, the narrator suggests Vere's suspicious nature by entering Vere's mind and describing his "dubious" thoughts about Claggart's intention (93) and his feelings partaking of "strong suspicion clogged by strange dubieties" (96). Because both of them tend to suppress their real feelings, once they betray passion, it becomes incredibly vehement (73 for Claggart: 101 for Vere).

In addition, the narrator focuses on their facial

expressions rather than on their minds. This narrative focus on their faces gives the reader the sense of distance. For example, in Chapter 10, when Claggart notices that Billy has spilled soup before him, his "countenance" changes but he playfully taps Billy with the "involuntary smile or rather grimace" (72). His bitter smile is changed later into "some distorting expression" that disconcerts a drummer-boy (73). Likewise, in Chapter 19 we can see a notable example of the narrator's focus on Vere's face. He describes Vere's expression at the decisive moment in which Billy kills Claggart. Finding Claggart dead, Vere covers his face with one hand, and then:

> Slowly he uncovered his face; and the effect was as if the moon emerging from eclipses should reappear with quite another aspect than that which had gone into hiding. The father in him, manifested towards Billy thus far in the scene, was replaced by the military disciplinarian (99-100).

With that striking change in Vere's face, which is likened to Gothicized re-emergence of the moon, the narrator insinuates Vere's transformation. The narrator here presents Vere as a distant Gothic figure like Claggart.[2]

In sharp contrast with Claggart and Vere, Billy is presented as frank, innocent, and trustful. If Billy is the protagonist of the story, Claggart and Vere will be the antagonists. Unlike Claggart and Vere, Billy is never "exceptional," because he represents sailors as a class (86-7). In order to explain Billy's frankness and innocence, the narrator explains that the sailors are "a juvenile race" in contrast with landsmen's habitual "undemonstrative distrustfulness," which is, as we have seen, a characteristic of Claggart's and Vere's (86-7). Billy is free from distrust. When he is taken to the cabin to see Claggart and Vere, he is surprised but the surprise is "unaccompanied by apprehension or distrust" (97-8). As some critics point out, Billy is truly romanticized allegorically in contrast with Vere and is presented as Other like Claggart: he is likened to an African Noble Savage (43), young Alexander (44), an Englishman of pure Saxon blood (51), a Greek sculpture of Hercules (51), a sort of upright barbarian (52), Adam before the fall (52), a condemned vested priestess (99), Christ (99, 124), and a Tahitian of Captain Cook's time or shortly after that time (121). However, in spite of all this religious, mythical, ethnological mystification of the Handsome Sailor, it is extremely important to notice that the narrator enters Billy's mind far more often than Claggart's and Vere's. There are many examples: he concentrates on Billy's horror at a flogging (Ch. 9), his puzzlement over the incident with a strange afterguardsman and over the old Dansker's equivocal advice (Ch. 15), his having no concern about the master-at-arms' feelings toward him (Ch. 17), his surprise at finding Claggart and Vere in the cabin and his amazement at Claggart's accusation (Ch. 19), and his unwillingness to tell about the afterguardsman and his puzzlement over Claggart's malice in the drumhead court (Ch.21).[3] Wayne Booth indicates that in fiction the psychic vividness of prolonged and deep inside view of a character evokes the reader's sympathy (377-8). This frequent and vivid depiction of Billy's mind helps to evoke the reader's sympathy for this innocent sailor because of emotional identification.

Although Billy is romanticized with many similes and metaphors for purity and innocence, he is demystified and humanized by the narrator's involvement with Billy's insides. That the narrator is sometimes patronizing toward Billy's ignorance (85, 88, 106) does not prevent the reader's sympathy for Billy. Rather, the patronizing attitude betrays the narrator's concern for Billy's vulnerability. By contrast, because of his similarity with Claggart, Vere is linked with distant Gothic otherness. His status as a pathetic hero is undermined by the emergence of a more pathetic hero, Billy, who appeals to the reader's mind through the narrator's narrative technique.

2. Narration Subverting Itself

The structure of the narrative is more strategically subversive of Vere's heroic image. The 27th chapter, which finishes the story of Billy's execution and describes the victory of naval discipline, gives the reader

a sense of ending. But the narrator adds three more chapters that are more powerful to the reader than the former part of the story.

In the beginning of Chapter 28 the narrator challenges Vere's triumphant statement, "forms, measured forms are everything" (128) of Chapter 27, by asserting, "The symmetry of form attainable in pure fiction cannot be achieved in a narration essentially having less to do with fable than with fact" (128). This assertion indirectly objects to Vere's insistence on forms by suggesting that forms are merely fictive, being based on pure fiction, not on facts. Moreover, interestingly enough, the narrator also challenges his own narration of Chapter 27. In the end of the chapter the narrator says that the fleece of low-hanging vapor glorifying Billy's ascension has vanished and that the "circumambient air in the clearness of its serenity" is "like smooth white marble" (128). The serenity of the air, with the narrator's metaphor of "smooth white marble," is symbolic of the triumph of Vere's forms in which every sailor goes back to regular work, forgetting Billy's death like vapor. However, in Chapter 28, the narrator states, "Truth uncompromisingly told will always have its ragged edges" (128). This "ragged edges" image of truth is in contrast with "smooth white marble." It not only strengthens the narrator's hint on the fictiveness of forms but also dismisses that triumphant air of naval discipline which is dominant in the previous chapter. It seems that the narrator here rejects the victory of Vere's discipline as the unsatisfactory ending of the story. He chooses truth and rejects fictive forms for his ending. Truth has its ragged edges. Truth is not smooth. Truth hurts. Truth undermines fiction.

In Chapter 28, the narrator rejects not only Vere's forms but also his status as a pathetic captain. In his commentary on Vere's death, the narrator supposes that "The spirit that 'spite its philosophic austerity may yet have indulged in the most secret of all passion, ambition, never attained to the fulness of fame" (129). This supposition reveals the hidden secret behind the mask of Vere's undemonstrative secretiveness: passion for fame ("fame, " with "fullness," is emphasized with the device of alliteration). Although the narrator says "may yet have," the statement is powerful because of his insistence on truth in the beginning of this chapter. The exposure of Vere's ambition creates the image of a greedy captain without justice, and overturns the fatherly image of him. It also hints Vere's affinity to Claggart, because the satisfaction of his personal feelings through rational means reminds us of Claggart's madness: the accomplishment of the irrational by employing the law of reason (76). Moreover, the narrator reveals that in Vere's words, "Billy Budd, Billy Budd," there are no "accents of remorse" (129). This remorseless about the execution of the foretopman, who does not plan any mutinies, reveals Vere's inhumanity.

In addition to the narrator's implicit critique of Vere in Chapter 28, the last two chapters are very important to approaching his final defense of Billy Budd. The narrator juxtaposes Chapter 29 with Chapter 30 as opposites, false one and true one. The narrator's important agenda, fiction vs. truth, is developed further. Chapter 29 quotes a naval chronicle of the time, which, with jingoistic tone, applauds Claggart as a respectable patriot and castigates Billy as a vindictive, depraved plotter. This authorized weekly publication clearly deflects the fact, and the narrator tells readers the striking fact that it is the only public record remaining about Claggart's and Billy's characters. By contrast, in Chapter 30, the narrator pursues the private world of Billy's fellow sailors. He focuses on bluejackets' view of the incident, and states, "Ignorant though they were of the secret facts of tragedy, … they instinctively felt that Billy was a sort of man as incapable of mutiny as of wilful murder" (131). In this understanding of Billy, readers can see the truth because they have read the narrator's inside narrative. They can reject the frighteningly false record of naval authority and sympathize with Billy's fellow sailors' insight into the incident. Robert Shulman persuasively points out the contrast between the official naval report and a foretopman's ballad, "Billy in the Darbies": the former presents the view from the top with bureaucratic language and outlook, whereas the latter,

with simple form and simple vernacular language, brings alive an ordinary sailor, Billy Budd, who has the last word (81). We must further notice that the ballad gives voice to Billy who cannot defend himself because of verbal defects, and, more significantly, demystifies the "Handsome Sailor" into an ordinary sailor. As Wayne Booth suggests, the use of the personal in fiction is emotionally powerful to the reader (212). Billy's personal voice, which his fellow foretopman creates in the ballad, appeals much more to the reader's emotion than the official voice of the naval report. Although Billy is executed physically and historically, he can survive in the personal ballad among his fellow sailors. The sailors' murmur was controlled and silenced by Vere after the execution of Billy, but it can finally articulate and voice its true feeling. It challenges the official record and its falseness, and succeeds in restoring the true Billy Budd.

The narrator's affinity to the sailors' point of view is revealed in the last two chapters. His story ends with the ballad, through which the reader can sympathize with the ordinary and personal Billy Budd. His position is not on the side of naval authority or Vere but on the side of Billy and the sailors. From this position, the narrator, a self-conscious truth-teller, finally exposes the danger of Vere's secretiveness, which leads to distortion and false history.

3. Christ vs. War

The narrator targets not only Captain Vere but also the world which he represents: a man-of-war. As Joyce Adler indicates (164), Vere internalizes the code of the naval world to which he dedicates himself. Likewise, Claggart indulges himself in naval code, functions as a vigilant, sadistic master-at-arms, and takes advantage of his status to revenge upon Billy. However, curiously enough, more than these main characters, the old Dansker, a minor character, epitomizes the nature of man-of-wars. In addition, the contrast between the *Rights-of-Man,* a merchantship, and the *Bellipotent,* a warship, exposes it further.

The old Dansker, an experienced military sailor, is the only one that Billy can seek advice from. Billy reveres the Dansker as a salt hero, and the Dankser, whose mind the narrator enters and describes, concerns about Billy because of the vulnerability of his innocence in a world with subtle "mantraps" (71). In spite of the friendship between them, the Dansker fails to make himself understood by Billy. He fails to persuade Billy that Claggart is down on him, and he cannot convince Billy that the afterguardsman secretly serves for "Squeak" or Claggart. In both cases, the Dansker's advice only strikes Billy as mystery and puzzles him more. The problem with the Dansker is that he is so laconic, cynical, and ascetic that he cannot give a full explanation to Billy. The narrator makes sarcastic comments regarding the Dansker's failure in both cases: "Years, and those experiences which befall certain shrewder men subordinated lifelong to the will of superiors, all this had developed in the Dansker the pithy guarded cynicism that was his leading characteristic" (71); "Long experience had very likely brought this old man to that bitter prudence which never interferes in aught and never gives advice" (86). These comments suggest the failure of experience. But also, they suggest that the Dansker is so accustomed to the hierarchy of warships that he has developed cynicism and prudence, which disable him from giving advice. We can recall that prudence and undemonstrativeness are major characteristics of Claggart and Vere. The narrator hints that the veteran sailor, the only person that can save Billy from Claggart's "mantrap," fails in communication because of his lifelong internalization of the ways of warships.

The narrative furthermore demonstrates the deteriorating character of a warship by presenting its contrast with a merchantship. Captain Graveling, the shipmaster of the *Rights-of Man,* is presented as the opposite of secretive and distrustful Vere. Graveling is a "honest soul at heart" who loves "simple peace and quiet" the best of all (45). He sees Billy as "the jewel of 'em," "a Catholic priest striking peace in an Irish shindy," and a "peacemaker" (46-7). He tells the lieutenant of the *Bellipotent* that because of Billy's "virtue" the sailors take to him "like hornets to treacle"

and that Billy creates a "happy family" on board (47). By contrast, the lieutenant calls both Billy and the guns of his warship as "beauties," and states that "blessed are the peacemakers, especially the fighting peacemakers" without noticing a contradiction in these last words (48). To him, Billy is, like guns, only a machine to fight battles, and his value as a fighter is much more important than his quality as a peacemaker. This militaristic perception of Billy can also be seen in Vere's view of the new recruit. The narrator summarizes how Vere sees the useful recruit: "In sum, Captain Vere had from the beginning deemed Billy Budd to be what in the naval parlance of the time was called a 'king's bargain': that is to say, for His Britannic Majesty's navy a capital investment at small outlay or none all" (95). As Michael C. Berthold suggests (113), the words, "bargain," "capital investment," and "outlay" hint Vere's militaristically utilitarian perspective. Rather than noticing Billy' virtue as an innocent peacemaker, he evaluates Billy by purely militaristic standards. The narrator here reveals that Vere's attitude toward Billy is not that of a father but that of military man from the beginning.

Vere's abandonment of the role of a father suggests an important contrast between the *Rights-of-Man* and the *Bellipotent.* On the former owing to Billy there is a "happy family," whereas the latter destroys family relationships. In describing the impressed men on the *Bellipotent,* the narrator focuses on the "saddish mood" of those, who "must have known a hearth of some sort" or "may have had wives and children left" in uncertain circumstances (50). This focus on the impressed men with families stresses the inhuman nature of impressment. Billy is a symbolic example. As a result of impressment, he is separated from his "family" and the fatherly captain on the *Rights-of Man,* and is executed by the military disciplinarian who fails to become a father figure. The *Bellipotent* is incapable of creating family or peace; it is a "sanctuary" for convicts (66), and it gives privilege to Claggart, a malignant master of surveillance. It discourages the Dansker or Vere from protecting the "child-like man." Warships prevent communication and connection, and impressment is symbolic of their cruelty.

Furthermore, Billy as a Christ figure has interesting implications. First of all, we have to notice the narrator's implicit Christian standpoint in viewing the military world. It can be seen in his succinct statement in Chapter 28, one of the last three chapters, that "the Athee (the Atheist)" is the "aptest name, if one consider, ever given to a warship; far more so indeed than the Devastation, the Erebus (the Hell), and similar names bestowed upon fighting ships" (129). This statement is truly strong, because the aptness of the Atheist is emphasized in comparison with the Devastation and the Hell, which are strong words as well. It suggests the narrator's bitter attack on warships, which represent atheism, denial of God. Toward the end of his story he makes clear his religiously critical position toward fighting ships.

However, before this chapter, in order to insinuate the atheistic nature of warships, the narrator juxtaposes Billy with weapons on the Bellipotent. In Chapter 24, on the upper gun deck he lies in irons under sentry between the guns. The narrator vividly describes the difference in color between the surroundings and Billy. All the things surrounding Billy--the guns, the carriages on which they are mounted, the rammers, and linstocks overhead-are "painted black" (118). In contrast with "the funereal hue of these surroundings," Billy wears "white jumper and white duck trousers," which glimmers in the obscure light of the place "like a patch of discolored snow in early April lingering at some upland cave's black mouth" (118-9). Over him, two battle lanterns, fed with the oil by the war contractors with splashes of "dirty" yellow light, "pollute the pale moonshine" (119). The narrator then concentrates on the "rose-tan" of Billy's complexion and "a serene happy light born of some wandering reminiscence or dream" diffusing over his face (119-20). With this strikingly visual imagery, the narrator vivifies the contrast between the weapons and Billy: the former is associated with blackness, death, darkness, obscurity, and pollution, whereas the latter is associated with whiteness, purity, spring, life, and light. The similarly vivid contrast can be seen in the next

chapter, in which Billy is hanged. Against the "vapory fleece hanging low in the East" shot through with "a soft glory as of the fleece of the Lamb of God," Billy ascends and takes "the full rose of the dawn" (124). By contrast, Vere stands erectly rigid "as a musket in the ship-armorer's rack" (124). Here the visual contrast between Billy and Vere reinforces the one in the previous chapter: whiteness, light, and life, vs. blackness (a musket) and death (the word "rack" suggesting torture). With the simile of a musket for Vere, he implies the ultimate goal of warships: changing a human being into a weapon.[4]

Ironically, the execution of the Christ figure is overlooked by the chaplain on the *Bellipotent*. The narrator pinpoints this irony, and expands the idea of Christ vs. warships. In Chapter 24, before the execution of Billy, the chaplain comes to see the imprisoned foretopman to teach him that he must die. This scene parallels Vere's interview with imprisoned Billy, because the narrator sentimentalizes the chaplain's interview with Billy as well. The narrator claims that this "minister of Christ" (120) is a "discreet man possessing the good sense of a good heart" (121), and describes the way the chaplain kisses "his fellow man" on the fair cheek instead of preaching to him (121). After elevating the chaplain into a admirable person in a sentimentalizing way, the narrator directly addresses the reader and lowers the chaplain's status:

> Marvel not that having been made acquainted with the young sailor's essential innocence the worthy man [the chaplain] lifted not a finger to avert the doom of such a martyr to martial discipline. So to do would not only have been as idle as invoking the desert, but would also have been an audacious transgression of the bounds of his function, one as exactly prescribed to him by military law as that of the boatswain or any other naval officer. Bluntly put, a chaplain is the minister of the Prince of Peace serving in the host of the God of War---Mars. As such, he is as incongruous as a musket would be on the altar at Christmas. Why, then, is he here? Because he indirectly subserves the purpose attested by the cannon; because too he lends the sanction of the religion of the meek to that which practically is the abrogation of everything but brute Force (121-2).

Here the overall tone is objective in explaining the function of a chaplain on warships to the reader. However, there is an important shift in position in this passage. In the first half of the passage, the narrator seems to defend the chaplain from possible doubt of his not attempting to save the essentially innocent foretopman from death. He stresses military law and the prescribed bounds of the chaplain's function. His tone here is sympathetic to the chaplain and is that of a military disciplinarian, because it is similar to Vere's insistence on martial law in the drumhead court. However, in the latter part of the passage, the narrator shifts from a sympathetic tone to one of abstraction. He juxtaposes a set of extremes: the Prince of Peace (Christ) vs. the God of War (Mars), the religion of the meek vs. brute Force. Within this framework, the narrator exposes the absurdity and hypocrisy of the chaplain: a minister of Christ who devotes himself to Mars. The chaplain is likened to a musket like Vere, and presented as a human weapon. Moreover, by using capitalized, abstract, powerful words, the narrator emphasizes the real nature of war as the abrogation of the religion of Christ. War is presented as "brute Force," a strong image, with an end-stopped emphasis. The narrator's initial defense of the chaplain is a mere gesture. The last bitter satire at chaplains and warships reveals his real view of war.

The narrator remains reliable after all. In spite of his narrative gestures, the use of the "Atheist" for warships, the evil imagery of weapons, and the satire at the ministers of Christ in warships testify that his moral position toward naval world is consistent. The narrator contrasts warships with Christ, and he is consistently on the side of the latter. He pursues the fate of Billy, a Christ figure, in the world of war in order to dramatize the inhumanity of the latter. Under the surface of his complicating, sometimes deceiving gestures, we can realize his true intention.

Conclusion

Through a complicated but satirical narrator, Melville effectively castigates Vere's execution of Billy and the naval world that he internalizes. The narrator's explicit, approving attitude toward Vere is Melville's prolonging gesture; it is a device to make subversion more effective. Melville may share conservative political thoughts with Vere, but it does not mean that he approves of Vere's decision to hang Billy.[5] Rather, Melville inveighs against the ambitious, merciless captain's distortion of the truth in that Billy neither plots any mutiny nor willfully murders Claggart.[6]

Beneath the surface of explicit elevation of Vere into a tragic hero, Melville locates a complex critique of the military disciplinarian's inhumanity. Melville clarifies the similarities between Claggart and Vere. Both of them are presented as undemonstrative, secretive, and distrustful. They are gothicized with their facial expressions. By contrast, Billy is humanized as a representative of sailors and made pathetic by Melville's vivification of Billy's feelings about flogging, the old Dansker, and Claggart.

Moreover, Melville employs the last three chapters to subvert Vere's ennobled status and to invalidate his relentless judgment of Billy. Stating that "forms," Vere's naval discipline, are based on fiction, not on truth, Melville rejects the triumph of Vere's strategic command (Ch. 28). He claims to locate truth at the core of his story, and informs three revelations about Vere: his secret ambition as motive for executing Billy, his rational madness, and his inhumanity under the mask of a father. Melville furthermore juxtaposes the official naval report (Ch. 29) and the sailors' truthful view of Billy (Ch. 30) in order to emphasize the falseness of the report that Vere's secrecy brings about. Although the official report remains as authorized history, a sailor's ballad has the last words in Melville's story. This final focus on the vicarious, personal voice of Billy heightens the reader's sympathy and suggests Melville's affinity for the sailors' world. Melville's presentation of the ballad echoes his later poems *John Marr and Other Sailors* (1888), in which Melville consistently expresses his nostalgia and longing for his fellow sailors, not for commanders or naval discipline. In addition, his final subversion of Vere's victory by using the last three chapters is reminiscent of the device that Melville employs in "Benito Cereno," (1856) in which the narrative speaks through Delano's eyes but finally subverts its culturally biased point of view.

Melville's presentation of Billy as a Christ figure aims to dramatize the inhumanity of not only Vere but also the military world. Melville cunningly hints at the evils of warships through the old Dansker's failure to save Billy and the sharp contrast between the *Rights-of-Man* and the *Bellipotent.* Warships destroy communication and connection, and ultimately turn human beings into weapons. Melville's religious standpoint can be seen in his bitter satire at the chaplain's failure to save the Christ figure. The satire suggests Melville's indictment against war, which is based on worship of brutal force and on the denial of Christ. This religious standpoint toward warships, including the idea of Christ vs. Mars, reminds us of Melville's earlier naval fiction, *White-Jacket* (1850).[7] The narrator of *White-Jacket* regards chaplains as useless on warships and asks the reader, "How can it be expected that the religion of peace should flourish in an oaken castle of war?" (157); he sees officers as "the priests of Mars" and laments that standing armies serve to keep alive the spirit of war even "in the meek heart of peace" (209). His language evidently echoes that of the narrator of *Billy Budd, Sailor.* It suggests that Melville preserves his position and deepens his musing on the conflict between peace and war, Christ and Mars. As a result, the narration of *Billy Budd* is more complex, subtle, and effective in re-emphasizing his critique of the military world.

As an experienced and mature writer, Melville thus uses complicated devices—juxtaposition of characters, the inconsistent and subversive narrative structure, and the victimization of Billy as a Christ figure in the world of Mars—and attempts to awaken the reader to that "truth uncompromisingly told" about warships

which is immanent in his narrative with "ragged edges." *Billy Budd, Sailor,* even though it is unfinished, is a crystallization and consummation of Melville's prolonging thoughts on war, his narrative devices, and his spiritual longing for his fellow sailors. Through this challenging novel Melville illuminates how war distorts truth and destroys humanity. He resists its destructive power by exploring the possibility of subversion in the sympathy between a peacemaker and his fellow sailors.

Notes

1 For instance, Mark Troy argues that Billy and Claggart are set in allegorical, timeless drama whereas Vere is historically and realistically presented.

2 Brett Zimmerman points out that Claggart is consistently associated with the moon in *Billy Budd, Sailor.* The simile of the moon for Vere's face in the quoted part is another interesting example of the parallel between them.

3 H. Bruce Franklin has indicated that Billy's thoughts on witnessing the flogging are identical to Melville's recorded thoughts on witnessing his first flogging. Franklin, 204.

4 In *White-Jacket,* the narrator says, "Some man-of-war's men have confessed to me that as a battle has raged more and more, ⋯, like their own guns, they have fought without a thought." *White-Jacket,* 320.

5 Brook Thomas suggests that Melville shares some of Vere's conservative thoughts and that he does not necessarily advocate the revolutionary alternative to measured forms. Thomas, 246.

6 Some critics contend that Melville keeps some distance from the narrator. For example, Thomas J. Scorza maintains that Melville intends to suggest the limitations of the modern conservative statesman and hero like Vere and the narrator. It seems to me, however, that the narrative is too complicated to be judged merely a story of a conservative. Given the narrative's subtlety and subversion, I could not see any authorial irony at the narrator.

7 Merton M. Sealts, Jr. and Hershel Parker point out that in composing *Billy Budd, Sailor,* Melville may have been rereading *White-Jacket.* See Sealts, 136 and Parker, 896.

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「妥協なしに語られた真実」

—『船乗りビリー•バッド』における語りの転覆 —

米 山 正 文

本論文は、ハーマン・メルヴィルの中篇小説『船乗りビリー・バッド』(1924)の語りの技巧を分析したものである。これまで批評家たちは登場人物の1人、ヴィア艦長に関する作者の立場について「受容派」と「皮肉派」に分裂し、解釈をめぐって論争を繰り広げてきた。本論文は「皮肉派」の立場をとり、ヴィアに対する作者の隠れた皮肉を、複雑な語りのテクニックの中に読み取ろうとするものである。

第1章では、語り手がヴィアの高貴な人物像を構築していく過程を概観したうえで、微妙な揶揄によって、それを脱構築していく過程を詳細に分析した。ヴィアへの揶揄を読み取るうえで、他の登場人物クラガートとビリーとの比較検討を行った。第2章では、小説の最後の3章が、それまでの完結したストーリーを根底から覆すように意図されていることを論じた。この3章で、語り手はヴィアの自己欺瞞や歴史の歪曲化を暴露し、船員の詩的想像における真実を列挙することで、ビリー処刑の正当性を覆していると論じた。第3章では、軍艦の環境をめぐる語り手の分析的批判を詳細に吟味した。他の登場人物、老ダンスカーや従軍牧師への語り手の風刺を論じ、語り手が宗教的な立場から軍艦やそれが象徴する世界を批判していることを、他のメルヴィル作品との比較も行いながら論じた。

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